# Hegseth says some Iranian air attacks may still hit targets | AP News

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth acknowledged Wednesday that some Iranian air attacks may still hit their targets even as he asserted that U.S. military superiority is quickly giving it control of the Islamic Republic's airspace.

The U.S. has spared "no expense or capability" to enhance air defense systems to protect American forces and allies in the Middle East, Hegseth told reporters at the Pentagon days after the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran in a war that has widened throughout the region.

"This does not mean we can stop everything, but we ensured that the maximum possible defense and maximum possible force protection was set up before we went on offense," he said.

The acknowledgement that additional drone or missile strikes in the region could cause damage and harm to troops comes as President Donald Trump and top defense leaders have warned that additional American casualties were expected in a conflict that could last months.

U.S. service members "remain in harm's way, and we must be clear-eyed that the risk is still high," Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said at the same press conference.

Six soldiers were killed when an Iranian drone strike hit an operations center Sunday in the heart of a civilian port in Kuwait, miles away from the main Army base. The husband of one of the slain soldiers, who was part of a supply and logistics unit based in Iowa, says the center was a shipping container-style building and had no defenses.

Caine declined to answer a reporter's question about the possibility of deploying ground troops in Iran, something that President Donald Trump has not ruled out.

"I'm not going to comment on U.S. boots on the ground," Caine said. "I think that's a question for policymakers. And I don't make policy, I execute policy."

Hegseth also signaled a possible longer time frame for the conflict than has previously been floated by the Trump administration, saying it could last eight weeks but that the U.S. has the munitions and the equipment to beat Iran in a war of attrition. He declined to set a specific time range, saying the specific duration of the war would depend on how it unfolds.

“You can say four weeks, but it could be six, it could be eight, it could be three,” he said. “Ultimately, we set the pace and the tempo. The enemy is off balance, and we’re going to keep them off balance.”

More forces continue to arrive in the region, including jet fighters and bombers, Hegseth said, and the U.S. “will take all the time we need to make sure that we succeed.”

Supplies of weaponry aren’t an issue, Hegseth and Caine said, with Hegseth noting that the military used more advanced weapons at the start of the campaign but was switching to gravity bombs now that the U.S. gains control of Iranian skies. Stockpiles of the advanced weapons remain “extremely strong,” the defense secretary said.

Caine said the U.S. has “sufficient precision munitions for the task at hand, both on the offense and defense,” but noted that the military would not be releasing quantities, citing operational security.

“So our air defenses and that of our allies have plenty of runway,” Hegseth said. “We can sustain this fight easily for as long as we need to.”

Tehran has vowed to completely destroy the Middle East’s military and economic infrastructure — signaling the war was nowhere near over and could expand further.

President Donald Trump said this week the campaign are likely to last four to five weeks but that he was prepared “to go far longer than that.”

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Associated Press writers Ben Finley and Meg Kinnard contributed to this report.